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WITH Americans, Abraham Lincoln is what John Drinkwater terms "an article of faith". This follows no doubt from the fact that he was the most American of all Americans. He was the most indigenous political leader America had yet produced. He was a child of the frontier, but he was vastly more than a backwoodsman. His family represented American migratory instincts, and the many-sided American life, particularly of the pioneers. As the family moved from place to place its members intermarried with those of the various localities, and, in a sense, gathered up and carried forward the traditions of the parts of America through which it passed.

The first in the line of the family from which Abraham Lincoln sprang came from England to Hingham, Massachusetts, whence descendants moved out into that Colony, settling at Scituate and Hull; taking up the occupations of farmer, blacksmith and miller. Mordecai Lincoln moved from Hull, where he had served as blacksmith and ironworker, to Monmouth County, New Jersey, in 1714, or a little before that date, and thence, probably in 1720, to French Creek, in the northern part of Chester County, Pennsylvania, where the smelting of iron was being introduced. He was a resident of Chester County and of Exeter Township, Berks County, Pennsylvania, during the third, fourth, and fifth decades of the eighteenth century. An account for 1735 shows that Mordecai Lincoln paid for shoes for his "Negro man". From this we may infer that the great-great-grandfather of Abraham Lincoln probably owned a negro slave in Pennsylvania one hundred and thirty-eight years before the Emancipation Proclamation. During the second quarter of the eighteenth century a considerable migration took place from Pennsylvania down the Great Valley to Virginia. Daniel Boone and, later, John Lincoln, the great-grandfather of Abraham Lincoln, shared in this

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migration. John Lincoln settled in Rockingham County, Virginia, about 1765–1768; Daniel Boone went on to Kentucky to be followed, about 1782, by John Lincoln's son, Abraham, the grandfather of the President. The next Lincoln generation was dissatisfied with Kentucky, and moved on to southern Indiana, and again, with the restlessness of the frontiersmen, to central Illinois. Even after reaching here the younger Abraham Lincoln showed the same restless spirit. Twice, as a young man, he helped to pole a flatboat to New Orleans, and twice in Illinois he moved from one county to another.

The United States was and is a geographic world empire. In her broad extent of latitude and longitude is included almost every variety of natural resource, climate, and production. So dissimilar are the various parts of the country that it was long common to suppose a close union between these parts to be impossible. Further to intensify sectional differences, people strikingly dissimilar came to settle in the different regions. The motives which brought them out as settlers were different, and in their interests and outlook on life they were widely apart.

As if to perpetuate the early sectionalism, when the lines of migration moved out to possess the great West they moved in the main along parallels of latitude. Of the streams of settlers which flowed across the continent, there were three main divisions: First, that from New England and New York, which passed through western New York into northern Ohio, and across the northern tier of States; second, that from the Middle States, which found its way up the Juniata, over the pass in western Pennsylvania, and down into the great valley of the Ohio; and third, that from Virginia and the Carolinas, which passed up the Potomac, through the Gap, and down into Kentucky. The streams passing through the two southernmost of these gateways tended to flow together in the Ohio Valley. From that commingling of peoples came Abraham Lincoln. His family, however, was originally from the northernmost section; it passed through the Middle States and reached the South before it joined the great westward movement. But, as if true to its destiny, this family was not content to remain in the South; it crossed again the line of division, merging its own life with that of the peoples

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that had come out from the regions farther to the north. Thus Abraham Lincoln represented in himself the deep moral purpose of Puritan New England, and to this was added the chivalric, hospitable, and easy-going spirit of the South.

The dissimilar regions had produced sectionalism in the statesmen who preceded and who were contemporary with Lincoln. Adams and Jefferson, Jackson and Calhoun, Clay and Webster, each represented the interest of a State or a section in national affairs. Lincoln was the first to know no North, no South, no East, no West. In himself he represented all sections; he knew only a united America. His development has well been termed "the nationalization of the provincial"; it may similarly be maintained that when he went to the Presidency he went as a "national figure presiding over men dominated by sectional interests".

Lincoln's political ideas were indigenous. In speaking at the State House in Philadelphia, in 1861, he said that he had never had a political sentiment which had not taken its rise from that building. Of all the great Americans, he was least influenced by the Old World. He had never crossed the sea; he knew next to nothing of foreign languages, and little of foreign civilizations. His Americanism was uncolored by the Old World inheritances. Other great Americans were Europeans living under New World conditions; Lincoln was a product of the New World environment. Of Lincoln as a New World character, reflecting a peculiar type of Americanism, Lowell wrote:

> For him her Old-World moulds aside she threw,
> And, choosing sweet clay from the breast
> Of the unexhausted West,
> With stuff untainted shaped a hero new,
> Wise, steadfast in the strength of God, and true.
> New birth of our new soil, the first American.

If we accept Burke's definition of a statesman as one who conceives of a nation as an organic entity, and who deals with every question which comes to him in its relation to the nation as a whole, who can be compared with Abraham Lincoln? In commenting on Lincoln and his work, Governor Samuel W. Pennypacker made the observation: "Too much has been said about

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saving the nation. More ought to have been said about the creation of the nation. This country never became a nation until after the battle of Gettysburg had been fought."

Lincoln came prominently before the country at a time when the old leaders were passing away, and when, with the coming of a new era, it was necessary to make new choices. He grew gradually in his political outlook. His brief term in Congress brought him into contact with national affairs at a time when the slavery question was being forced to the front. In the years 1847 to 1849, David Wilmot repeatedly attached a paragraph to various bills pending in Congress, to the effect that their enactment into laws was to be with the proviso that slavery should be excluded from any territory which might come into the possession of the United States as a result of the Mexican War. Lincoln said that he voted for the Wilmot Proviso "as good as forty times".

The slavery question was not new when Lincoln came into public affairs. There was violent agitation over it during Monroe's administration, at which time the Missouri Compromise was effected. President Monroe expressed the conviction that the controversy would be "winked away" by the Compromise. John Quincy Adams, then Secretary of State, wrote in his diary a conviction that the slavery controversy would outlast both Monroe and himself. Daniel Webster set forth the idea, in his famous Seventh of March speech in 1850, that nature had determined by an irrepealable law that a part of the territory of the United States should perpetuate the institution of negro slavery while another part was to be freed from it; arguing in effect that the attempt to eradicate slavery by Constitutional amendment or by enactment under the Constitution was either unnecessary or futile.

The compromises of 1820 and 1850 only put off a settlement of the slavery issue. We ought not to minimize their importance; they gave time for the nation to find itself, and for the Union sentiment to grow. The North also was becoming strong, to stand against the dismemberment of the Union.

In 1858, after the Dred Scott decision had added fuel to the flame kindled by the Kansas-Nebraska act, Lincoln made his famous attack on Douglas in a speech delivered in Springfield;

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the direct challenge which led to the Lincoln-Douglas debates. The keynote of the speech was: "A house divided against itself cannot stand. This government cannot endure permanently, half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved, I do not expect the house to fall; but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing, or all the other." This speech has been characterized as "like a shout from the watchtower of history". The inevitable tendency of the Kansas-Nebraska bill and of the Dred Scott decision in the direction of the extension of slavery was set forth in this speech in such fashion as to alarm the North lest the country should become all slave. The central thought of the speech was opposed by some of Lincoln's friends and advisers as likely to sacrifice his interests, but Lincoln asserted that he would rather be defeated with this expression in his speech than be successful without it. His answer was, "If it is decreed that I should go down because of this speech, then let me go down linked to the truth—let me die in the advocacy of what is just and right."

The Lincoln-Douglas debates made Lincoln a national figure. Later he carried the case against the extension of slavery into the East in the famous Cooper Union address. In brief, he became the spokesman of the moral sentiment of the North against the extension of slavery into any territory where it had not been already established by law.

Lincoln was, however, no visionary dreamer; his Americanism was that of a practical statesman. He was always seeking to adapt means to ends in the accomplishment of his great purpose. He was even willing to sacrifice the lower principle for the higher, as was illustrated in his policy during the Civil War. Again and again he set forth the fact that his aim was the preservation of the Union, and when some of his friends in the North sought to substitute the slavery question for that of the preservation of the Union, he argued that if he could save the Union by freeing the slaves he would free the slaves, but that if he could save the Union by continuing slavery he would deem it his duty to save the Union. In the light of history, we now see how clear was Lincoln's vision, and how unerringly he moved to the accomplishment of his great purpose.

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In 1858 Lincoln represented a revolutionary moral protest against the evil of slavery, and in a measure against the Government that would condone such an evil. After his election he represented the Government itself; it was then his mission to see that the laws were enforced, the Constitution preserved. With secession impending, and later when it became a reality, Lincoln stood by the Constitution and his duty to defend it. In his speech at Independence Hall, on his way to Washington in February, 1861, he intimated what his policy would be, and in his first inaugural he clearly stated the position of the Government in the following language: "In *your* hands, my dissatisfied fellow-countrymen, and not in *mine*, is the momentous issue of civil war. The Government will not assail *you*. You can have no conflict, without being yourselves the aggressors. *You* have no oath registered in Heaven to destroy the Government, while I shall have the most solemn one to 'preserve, protect, and defend it'." His first inaugural was an appeal to common sense in support of the idea of union.

Writing in 1864 on the evolution of his thinking which brought him to declare slaves free, Lincoln said:

I did understand, however, that my oath to preserve the Constitution to the best of my ability imposed upon me the duty of preserving, by every indispensable means, that government—that nation, of which that Constitution was the organic law. Was it possible to lose the nation and yet preserve the Constitution? By general law, life and limb must be protected, yet often a limb must be amputated to save a life; but a life is never wisely given to save a limb. I felt that measures otherwise unconstitutional might become lawful by becoming indispensable to the preservation of the Constitution through the preservation of the nation. Right or wrong, I assumed this ground, and now avow it. I could not feel that, to the best of my ability, I had even tried to preserve the Constitution, if, to save slavery or any minor matter, I should permit the wreck of government, country, and Constitution all together. When, early in the war, General Frémont attempted military emancipation, I forbade it, because I did not then think it an indispensable necessity. When, a little later, General Cameron, then Secretary of War, suggested the arming of the blacks, I objected because I did not yet think it an indispensable necessity. When, still later, General Hunter attempted military emancipation, I again forbade it, because I did not yet think the indispensable necessity had come. When, in March and May and July, 1862, I made earnest and successive appeals to the Border States to favor compensated emancipation, I believed the indispensable necessity for military emancipation and arming the

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blacks would come unless averted by that measure. They declined the proposition, and I was, in my best judgment, driven to the alternative of either surrendering the Union, and with it the Constitution, or of laying strong hand upon the colored element.

Lincoln's Americanism was big enough to rise above sectionalism or personal hatred. He was the object of the most bitter and vituperative attacks, chiefly from the South but by no means limited to the South. Repeatedly was he called "a bloody butcher" and "an ignorant boor". One who examines the large collection of Lincoln cartoons in the Library of Congress at Washington, covering the years immediately preceding and during the Civil War, will find that Lincoln was reviled and stigmatized in the most extreme fashion in the South, in the North, and even in England, but through it all he knew not how to speak a word of harshness, or to harbor a feeling of animosity. Carried away with the supreme task of saving the Union, he forgot all personal insults, and out of the heat of the Civil War wrote the Second Inaugural, which must be reckoned one of the most inspired documents which ever came from the pen of man. The sentiment, "with malice toward none: with charity for all," considering the period and conditions under which it was written, may almost be compared with the prayer of Christ for His persecutors as He hung upon the Cross. Carl Schurz characterized this as having "all the solemnity of a father's last admonition and blessing to his children before he lay down to die".

The success of the National cause gave Lincoln the power by which he might have crushed and humiliated his enemies in the South, and those who had opposed him in the North, but his success called forth sentiments, not of punishment, but rather of a generous good will. The spirit of Lincoln was well shown in the response which he made to his friends when they waited on him after his second election in 1864. "Now that the election is over," said he, "may not all having a common interest reunite in a common effort to save our common country? For my own part, I have striven and shall strive to avoid placing any obstacle in the way. So long as I have been here, I have not willingly planted a thorn in any man's bosom. While I am deeply sensible to the high compliment of a reëlection, it adds nothing to my

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satisfaction that any other man may be disappointed or pained by the result. May I ask those who have not differed with me, to join with me in this same spirit toward those who have?"

Lincoln's Americanism was shown in his statesmanlike insistence that the seceded States had never been out of the Union, and, therefore, that when they were brought into subjection they were still in the Union. This left no room for reconstruction or the readmission of States. Statesmen of less vision could not realize in the era after the Civil War that the war was actually over. They wanted to discipline the South. Samuel McChord Crothers, in his essay "In Praise of Politicians", singles Lincoln out as the man who saw his official duty above any personal or sentimental feeling. What Dr. Crothers well terms "the tragic blunders of Reconstruction" resulted from the action of those in the Federal Government who lacked Lincoln's insight to see the meaning of the Union. "It took the ordinary politician," says Dr. Crothers, "a quarter of a century to see what the great politician could see in an instant."

But as Lincoln lived for the Union, so he also died for it. We may say that the life-blood of Abraham Lincoln was the seal for the new Union, and that in his death he completed the formation of this "more perfect Union" to which he had given so many anxious years. In ancient times and among heathen peoples the most precious human beings were offered as sacrifices. Abraham Lincoln wrought more by his death than by his life. In the shedding of his blood there was a mystical Union which created a new and, we trust, under God, a permanent nationality. According to a tradition of an Eastern land, the sweetest-toned bell could be obtained only by the sacrifice of a beautiful and innocent maiden, and as the molten metal was prepared for the casting of the bell, the life-blood of such a victim was poured into the composition. The life-blood of Lincoln was the seal for a new Union and in his death his life's work was completed.

The development of Lincoln's ideas of government was progressive. At first he was a local politician; next he was sent to the Legislature of Illinois when the State was "backwoods", where, as Elihu Root has said, he "learned the rudiments of government". After practicing law he was sent to Congress,

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where he received enlarged notions of government. He then studied the slavery question in its relations to the nation, and became the leader of the opposition to the extension of slavery. But Lincoln's political ideas outgrew his own country, and the ideals of his democracy rose above national selfishness. He impressed himself upon the political thought of the world. As Lloyd George has pointed out, in his life Lincoln was considered a great American; at his death he had world influence; and now he "belongs to the common people in every land".

A few years ago, in a discussion of Lincoln before a Philadelphia audience made up chiefly of recently arrived immigrants, a Russian who spoke broken English made the statement that a fugitive sentiment of Lincoln's concerning liberty, "He who would be no slave must consent to have no slave," which he had seen in far-away Russia, had served him as a beacon light leading him to Lincoln's country. Those acquainted with the thought of the common people in Japan say that in that country Lincoln is the best known of all Americans, and that he typifies the idea of liberty to the Japanese people. Count Tolstoi held that Lincoln was too big to be owned by one nation; that he belonged to the whole world.

In recent years men have asked over and over, What would Lincoln have done in this or that emergency? Of one thing we may rest assured: his political ideas would have grown with the nation's need and the world's need. Above all the men of his time he saw the hand of God in the affairs of this world. He yielded to the Divine leadership, and under God gave this nation a new birth of freedom so that "government of the people, by the people, for the people" should not perish from the earth. In the times of new national peril, men may well draw from him fresh lessons of faith in the overruling power of Almighty God, and patience in dealing with the trying problems with which they are confronted. The world will enthrone justice and good will, this nation of ours will be safe, the destiny of the Commonwealth will be secure, the land in which we live will be a goodly place in which to dwell, as long as men emulate the virtues and imitate the action of this "first" American.

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